

Revised Equestrian Use Rules for Bryce Canyon National Park

**** Revised Rules Take Affect February 1, 2015 ****

Bryce Canyon National Park initiated a public comment period for 30 days beginning March 26, 2014 regarding proposed changes for users of privately-owned stock on designated horse trails within the park. Changes are intended to ensure the safety of all visitors and to protect park resources. Trails open to horseback riding are steep and narrow given the terrain below the Canyon rim and offer limited space for stock groups to pass. When unfamiliar groups of stock converge, horses may spook. Guests on concessioner-guided trail rides may be unfamiliar with equestrian techniques and unable to manage their mounts under these situations. It is the intent of the park, the trail ride concessioner and private equestrian users to promote, and be proactive in, equestrian safety and safe trail use.

Bryce Canyon National Park received approximately 400 e-mails, phone calls and letters from the public and we appreciate that so many folks took the time to comment! Please be assured that we read every e-mail and letter, and took notes on each phone call in order to capture folks' concerns and the many excellent suggestions on how to improve safety, resource protection and management of equestrian use in the park.

In addition, we met together with our trail ride concessioner and officers of the Backcountry Horsemen of Utah, taking advantage of their extensive expertise, to develop solutions to identified issues. We also consulted with the Office of the State Veterinarian to address animal health concerns and applicable rules. With your comments and suggestions, and the consultations with these experts and their endorsement, we have revised rules for equestrian use at the park that we feel meet safety and resource protection needs under a practical management approach. The success of this initiative depends on cooperation, courtesy and everyone's interest in providing the excellent park experience we all expect. In advance, thank you for your continued interest and cooperation!

Below is an analysis of the issues, comments and decisions. These decisions constitute the revised rules for horseback riding in the park. To allow time for preparations, we will begin implementation **February 1, 2015** in time for the 2015 field season. A condensed version of these revised rules is also available on our park website at: <http://www.nps.gov/brca/planyourvisit/trailrides.htm>

Again, thank you for your interest and effort to provide input to this decision process. We look forward to serving you when you visit your national park in the future!

Jeff Bradybaugh
Superintendent

ISSUE: Requirement for Private Equestrians to Hire a Guide

The proposed changes included a requirement that private equestrians would be required to hire and pay for a guide provided by the park trail ride concessioner.

Analysis: Respondents universally disapproved of this proposed change. Most respondents felt that private equestrians are sufficiently skilled in backcountry riding such that they can manage situations on narrow, steep trails and that they had no concern yielding to less experienced riders on concession-led trail rides. Many respondents were willing to pay a small fee to help defray park expenses in managing equestrian use, but objected that the proposed guiding rates were excessive.

Decision: The park will not require private equestrians to hire a guide. Park Rangers will discuss safety procedures, Leave No Trace and trail etiquette during equestrian groups check-in, similar to long-established procedures at the park, but will provide greater emphasis on trail directional (one-way only) routing, areas of steep or narrow trails, and the area with two-way horse traffic. A newly revised map will be provided to equestrians at check-in. At this time, the park is not proposing a fee to help offset park expenses in managing equestrian use, though a small fee was endorsed most respondents.

ISSUE: Route-Finding and Directional Horse Traffic

Eliminated the guiding requirement places responsibility on all equestrian users to carefully adhere to directional routing on the park horse trails to maximize safety. Scheduling was also suggested by most respondents as a technique to avoid potential crowding, conflicts with concession rides and to help alleviate associated safety concerns.

Analysis: Park staff, concessioner and officers from Backcountry Horsemen of Utah examined potential route changes that might alleviate safety and traffic issues. Once descending from the canyon rim, the steep nature of the trails limit the route direction, as some portions of the trail are most safely negotiated only while riding uphill on horseback. The trail on the west side of the Peek-a-boo Loop is particularly narrow from the rest area to the Boulevard; the Binkie Hollow section is steep and must be negotiated while climbing. The portion of the trail from the Rim to the head of Binkie Hollow (Falling Rock) is the only route in and out of the canyon and must sustain traffic in two directions – some sections are steep and others narrow. Respondents suggested more and/or improved signage would be helpful in assuring that equestrian flow would occur in the proper direction. Park staff, concessioner and officers from Backcountry Horsemen of Utah also examined potential scheduling options at different times of day (see scheduling discussion below).

Decision: Trail routing will remain the same as it is currently. Additional signage will be added to assist equestrians in route finding where trails intersect and to provide users with directions for safe flow. Temporary rustic signs will be used initially to judge their best locations and efficacy, prior to installing backcountry-appropriate permanent signs later. Scheduling of both private equestrian rides and concession trail rides will be used to minimize 2-way encounters of horse ride groups moving in opposite

directions on the portion of the trail between the Rim and the head of Binkie Hollow (Falling Rock). In all cases and in all locations, should encounters occur, private riders will yield to concession trail rides by stopping and allowing concession trail rides to pass and if necessary, back-tracking to a safe passing location.

While we expect scheduling and careful adherence to the schedule to accomplish the desired result, Park staff, concessioner and officers from Backcountry Horsemen of Utah identified two optional techniques to use in the future, if necessary: a) Where the 2-way trail from the Rim to the head of Binkie Hollow intersects with the trail coming up to the top of Binkie Hollow (riders leaving the canyon), a “flag” could be displayed where riders would see that concession trail ride parties are coming down the trail and private riders would hold their position. When concession trail rides are clear of the intersection, the trail ride guide will drop the flag, indicating that the trail to the rim is clear of concession trail rides. b) Another approach, would be to have private riders coming up to the top of Binkie Hollow (riders leaving the canyon) hold their position until a set time when incoming scheduled concession trail rides would have passed this point in morning and in early afternoon.

ISSUE: Scheduling for Private Equestrian Rides

Scheduling was recommended by most respondents as a technique to avoid potential conflicts with concession rides, help alleviate associated safety concerns and avoid crowding.

Analysis: Park staff, concessioner and officers from Backcountry Horsemen of Utah examined potential scheduling options at different times of day. The concessioner mounted more than 16,000 guests in 2013. The concession trail ride schedule is consistent and operations are fairly constant during the day which helps in scheduling private equestrian use with openings early morning, midday and late afternoon - evening.

Decision: As recommended by commenters, scheduled times will be established for private equestrian groups in order to facilitate their use and reduce potential conflicts. Departure times from the concession day corral for private equestrian groups will be: 7:30am; 12:30pm; 4:30pm and every half hour thereafter up to 1 hour before sunset. Strict adherence to departure times will be necessary to avoid intermingling with concession trail rides. Private equestrians will be required to schedule their ride at least 72 hours in advance by contacting the Park via e-mail: BRCA_Information@nps.gov Scheduling in advance will allow the Park to arrange for a Park Ranger to meet the party for orientation/check-in and provide notice to the concessioner that other users will be on the trail. Private equestrians will be required to stop at the concession day-corral along the trail leading from the mixing circle (trailer parking/unloading location) to the Rim, to sign a register and the Park will mount a large map there to help equestrians further orient themselves and examine trail routing before entering the canyon. At Ranger orientation/check-in, maps of the trail system and guidelines for trail use are also provided to equestrian groups.

ISSUE: Equestrian Group Size

A number of respondents commented that specifying group size may assist in managing equestrian safety and use.

Analysis: Most private equestrians visiting the park consist of groups of less than 8 riders and horses. For safety reasons, the park trail ride concession must maintain a guide to guest ratio of 1 guide per 10 riders or less.

Decision: The park will establish a limit of 10 riders and their horses per private equestrian group.

ISSUE: Equine Health and Testing for Equine Infectious Anemia (Coggins Testing)

Many respondents commented negatively on the park's long-standing requirement that all equestrians show documentation of a current, negative Coggins test for Equine Infectious Anemia for their stock.

Analysis: Utah law requires that all stock entering from outside of Utah must have a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (valid for 30 days) and the certificate must show a negative Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) (Coggins - AGID or ELISA) test within the past 12 months. This applies to stock domiciled in Utah that leave Utah and subsequently return to the State. Equines domiciled in the State that do not leave Utah are not required to have a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection nor documentation of a negative Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) (Coggins - AGID or ELISA) test within the past 12 months. Park staff, concessioner and officers from Backcountry Horsemen of Utah discussed these requirements and Park staff consulted with the State Veterinarian's Office, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food in order to develop a practical rule in compliance with state law.

Decision: Equine stock brought to Bryce Canyon National Park must comply with Utah law. The following requirements will be in place for the park and apply to concession, privately-owned or NPS-owned or contracted horses and mules:

- a) All stock brought to the park that originate from outside of Utah must have a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (valid for 30 days) and the certificate must show a negative Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) (Coggins - AGID or ELISA) test within the past 12 months.
- b) For Utah equestrians, Rangers will ask you to certify that your animals have not left the State in the past 6 months; otherwise the requirements for Certificate of Veterinary Inspection and a negative Coggins test will apply.
- c) Utah law requires that owners of any horses being transported within Utah, whether originating in Utah or in another State must carry proof of ownership. Approved forms of proof of ownership are found at the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food website: <http://ag.utah.gov/animal/animal-identification/36-animals/238-livestock-movement.html>

Proof of ownership will also be used to verify the requirement for a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection and Coggins testing, for out-of-state horses.

d) Rangers will check the documentation described above prior to stock being allowed in the park and equestrians will be required to provide proper documentation and certify that their stock meet these requirements.

Thank you for your interest in horseback riding in Bryce Canyon National Park, and again, we greatly appreciate the many constructive comments and suggestions provided. We hope this information will be helpful in planning and enjoying equestrian opportunities in Bryce Canyon National Park.